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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 19 March 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit, in the six official languages of the United Nations, the enclosed report on the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS). It is the President's progress report for the years 1994-1997. The second session of the Forum took place in Ottawa, in February 1997, at the invitation of the Canadian Government.

The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby members consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks within the framework of chapter 19 of Agenda 21.

It would be very useful if this report were distributed as an official document of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, from 7 to 25 April. Canada suggests that the recommendations of the IFCS should be considered within the framework of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997.

(Signed) Robert R. FOWLER
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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IFCS

Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

President's Progress Report 1994-1997

Forum II

Second Session
of the
Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

Ottawa, Canada
10 - 14 February, 1997

President's Progress Report 1994-1997

Submitted by Canada,
on behalf of the IFSC

PRESIDENT'S PROGRESS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY (IFCS or Forum) was established in 1994 in response to a recommendation of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The Forum is a mechanism for the promotion of the risk assessment of chemicals and their environmentally sound management.

2. The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby representatives of governments, international and intergovernmental organizations, and a wide range of non-governmental organizations, meet to consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks. There is a strong emphasis on the full and open participation of all partners with the result that the Forum operates by consensus.

3. At its first meeting, the Forum adopted detailed recommendations on priorities of action for the effective implementation of national and international efforts in the six Programme Areas of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. At its second meeting, in February 1997, the Forum has taken stock of its accomplishments and noted where progress has been slow or non-existent on the recommendations, charting its direction for the next three years.

4. In general, the level of achievement has been most encouraging. The targets for the assessment of chemicals are being met, the global system for the harmonization and classification of chemicals is progressing well, a number of new initiatives are improving information exchange on chemicals, the Forum has had appreciable influence on a number of risk reduction activities and has promoted the development of comprehensive national profiles which strengthen the management capacity of countries. A new international mechanism for co-ordination between international and inter-governmental organizations, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, has been established.

5. However, much remains to be done. The commitment of governments to the goals of the Forum has not always been matched by their involvement and support of Forum initiatives. Many countries need to institute a stronger infrastructure to manage effectively their chemical risks. The level of funding by the participants has been less than adequate to provide a Secretariat with long-term support and to ensure the full participation of developing countries.

6. The Forum provides a unique, over-arching mechanism for co-ordinating global action on chemicals. Its non-institutional nature and wide range of participation by all parties give it a remarkable ability to provide answers and assessments to the problems to health and the environment raised by chemicals. It has been well-launched, now it needs for all its participants to follow through on their commitments to pursue the goal of the environmentally sound management of chemicals, particularly as set out in Agenda 21.

The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS):

Reaffirms the importance of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and *recommends*, therefore, that United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS):

- *Recognize* that the sound management of chemicals is essential to sustainable development, and that it is a fundamental underpinning of human health, safety and environmental protection and in achieving success in many other chapters of Agenda 21.

- *Recognize* that the IFCS, established in response to the request of governments at United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, has evolved to be the over-arching framework to develop and promote through a consensus building process international strategies and partnerships among national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations for the sound management of chemicals.

- *Recognize* that governments alone cannot assure the sound management of chemicals. There is a critical role for voluntary industry efforts of responsible care and product stewardship, advocacy and community efforts by labour and public interest non-governmental organizations, and the specialized work of intergovernmental and scientific organizations. The greatest achievements come when all parties work together in partnership.

- *Recognize* that substantial progress has been made through cooperation among partners in achieving the targets in Chapter 19, especially in relation to:

  - identifying the risks to human health and the environment posed by persistent organic pollutants;
  - accelerating the international assessment of the risks of chemicals;
  - implementing the voluntary procedures and in negotiating the legally binding instrument for prior informed consent;
  - developing Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers;
  - moving toward a globally harmonized system for the classification and labelling of chemicals;
  - the promotion of alternatives that reduce the need for using of chemicals (e.g., integrated pest management); and
  - starting to deal with the problems of stocks of obsolete chemicals.

  However, despite substantial progress much remains to be done and will need to continue to be a priority well beyond the year 2000.

- *Recognize* that scientific research will continue to uncover new facts and bring about a better understanding of the effects of chemical substances on human health and the environment. One example is the rapidly growing body of scientific research that indicates that a number of substances have the potential to interfere with normal body functions

governed by the endocrine system. Such emerging issues need to be addressed through research that leads to strategic actions to deal with these risks.

- *Recognize* the leadership role of those governments and organizations that have furthered the work of the Forum by bringing together governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the support of countries and organizations that have generously contributed by providing assistance to governments in need for their participation. Other countries and organizations are invited to join in promoting the sound management of chemicals through donation of funds or contributions in kind.

- *Recommend* that donors, including multilateral development banks, ensure that development policies, and investments in programs and projects that entail chemicals management include support for the necessary capacity building for developing countries and countries in economic transition to ensure the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

- *Recommend* that national governments take leadership to enhance the efforts of all the partners in finding innovative ways to provide necessary resources for the sound management of chemicals. In particular, this should focus on improving safety, promotion of cleaner technology, adoption of pollution prevention concepts, and capacity building.

PRESIDENT'S PROGRESS REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

7. Chemicals are an essential requirement of modern society but their use can pose appreciable risks to human health and the environment. These risks must be reduced and managed throughout the world in the most cost-effective and sustainable manner. The concept of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS or Forum) arose during the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); it was refined and developed by a meeting of government-designated experts held in London in 1991. This meeting proposed that an intergovernmental forum on chemical risk assessment and management be established to promote the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

8. The 1992 UNCED reaffirmed this recommendation in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 which led, in turn, to the first meeting of the Forum in 1994 and the adoption of Terms of Reference and Priorities for Action. The latter are an elaboration and delineation of the six Programme areas of Chapter 19 and provide detailed and achievable targets for national governments and the international community. The key role of governments in achieving these targets was fully recognized and the benefits of regional co-operation in the implementation process stressed.

9. There have been two meetings of the Intersessional Group (ISG) of the Forum, which was developed to provide continuity and direction between the Forum meetings; 1995 in Bruges, 1996 in Canberra. The ISG consists of 31 countries. A number of other countries, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations, have actively participated in the meetings. The second meeting of the Forum took place in Ottawa, February 1997, at the invitation of the Government of Canada.

Purpose and Functions

10. The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby representatives of governments, international and intergovernmental organizations and a wide range of NGOs meet to consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks. The goal is to seek consensus among these groups to achieve the implementation of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. The purpose of the Forum is to provide policy guidance and strategies and to achieve improved co-ordination, with a particular emphasis on the regional and sub-regional groups to deal with these issues. The Forum has neither the mandate nor the resources to implement the ensuing recommendations. Ultimately, that is a task for governments and other participants in the Forum.

11. Although the Forum gives particular attention to Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, its remit is much more wide-ranging. All questions concerning chemical risks are within the purview of the Forum. This means that linkages can be explored and developed whether between the six

Programme areas of Chapter 19 or between Chapter 19 and other Agenda 21 issues such as hazardous wastes or human health.

12. The functions of the Forum include the identification of priorities for all aspects of chemical safety, both health and environmental, and to promote co-ordinating mechanisms at the national and international levels. The Priorities for Action, adopted in 1994, identified some 43 specific recommendations, many with target dates, for the realization of the environmentally sound management of chemicals. Governments carry the primary responsibility in implementing these recommendations but there is no question that the close collaboration of international bodies and NGOs is essential to the success of the process.

13. The Forum serves to bring the element of global accountability to bear on all parties in achieving the environmentally sound management of chemicals. By clearly delineating the goals and target dates, the level of achievement by governments, in particular, is made visible and is reinforced if the targets are pragmatic and attainable; such clarity works for the public good.

Strengths of the Forum

14. The non-institutional nature of the Forum and its general and comprehensive Terms of Reference provide a flexibility and adaptability not often found in international organizations. Although voting is formally restricted to governments, in practice the emphasis on full participation of all partners has led to a consensual mode of operation. The transparency of the working procedures and the need for the full participation of all partners has resulted in a unique approach in dealing with global chemical safety issues. The views of all stakeholders are canvassed and heeded. This gives great weight to the conclusions and recommendations made by the Forum.

15. This approach is in complete accord with the basic principle of partnership that was imbued in the spirit of Agenda 21, and particularly developed in Chapter 27. The full recognition of the role of all sectors of society — governments, social partners, industry, scientific organizations, and environmental, public interest and worker groups — in promoting the sound management of chemical risks is an essential element in the Forum's working mechanism.

16. A pragmatic approach in developing the recommendations on a regional basis has led to a number of meetings in the regions so that they can consider all aspects of the issues. This process has been greatly aided by the regional considerations that were evident when the Officers of the Forum and Intersessional Group countries were elected.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS ON PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

17. Analysis of the individual recommendations identified within the Priorities for Action at Forum I in 1994 shows that there has been an encouraging level of success in many areas.

However, this success is by no means uniform either in terms of the Programme Areas or in the particular regions of the world. The following overview focuses on the issues where the Forum has played a major role in initiating the requisite actions. The presence of the Forum has, on occasion, been catalytic in global initiatives on chemical safety.

18. The implementation of the Priorities for Action is, first and foremost, a government responsibility. Yet it has not been easy for the IFCS Secretariat to garner the requisite information from the national bodies; this is clearly an area where improvement is needed. The IFCS Regional Working Groups have been of some assistance in this regard and their role in information-gathering should be strengthened.

19. Although the Forum has, from the outset, recognized the importance of developing linkages to other Agenda 21 issues, it has not focused on this area to date. There is a need to identify those areas or specific activities in chemicals management where linkages exist (e.g., issues affecting human health) and to establish dialogue and co-operation with other fora and organizations in these areas so that joint mutually beneficial efforts may be co-ordinated and progress achieved.

20. A singular international initiative on chemical safety has been the establishment, in 1995, of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). The Forum continues to have a pivotal role in promoting and supporting this mechanism for co-ordinating the efforts of intergovernmental organizations in the field of chemical safety. The IOMC is a co-operative undertaking among intergovernmental organizations that, within the framework of their own respective constitutional mandates, work together as partners to promote international work. The current Participating Organizations are UNEP, ILO, FAO, WHO, UNIDO and OECD and the process has been initiated to extend membership to UNITAR. Scientific and technical work of the IOMC is carried out through the existing structures of the Participating Organizations, either individually or jointly. Co-ordination of activities with other organizations, institutions, or programmes involved in the area of chemical safety, e.g. Commission of the European Communities, may be carried out within the framework of the IOMC. The IOMC and the Forum have different but interrelated roles and responsibilities, complementing each other in the efforts to develop co-operative and co-ordinated activities at the international level.

21. In the following, the achievements and challenges of the Forum and its partners in the various areas are described.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area A: Expanding and Accelerating International Assessment of Chemical Risks	
22. By agreeing on numerical targets for the evaluation of additional chemicals within defined time frames, the IFCS has been able to focus co-operative efforts among national governments, international organizations and industry. To make better use of high quality national evaluations, a new additional type of international assessment document has been developed by the International Programnme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) and efforts are well underway to develop a co-ordinated, step-wise process to address existing chemicals and pesticides with maximum sharing of the burden and maximum output of assessments. Thus far, 119 such assessments have been completed and the prospects for IPCS and OECD to meet the target of 200 assessments by the end of 1997 are good.	23. Assessing 300 additional chemicals by 2000, which is the original goal, will require additional resources and efforts by all concerned.
24. The UNEP/ECETOC Inventory of Critical Reviews on Chemicals has been published in 1996. General criteria for the selection of chemicals were set out at an international consultation.	25. The IFCS will help identify candidates for future risk assessment through its Regional Working Groups.
26. There has been little progress on gaining access to and generating human exposure data or good quality health effects data from developing countries. Several small surveys of national governments to gather information on the types of risk assessment information and documents needed have met with minimal success.	27. More concentrated work is required in this area.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area B: Harmonization of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	
28. The development of a global harmonized system for classification and labelling has progressed well. The Forum has encouraged and sponsored the implementation of this work by the IOMC Co-ordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems and this group is working to meet the 1997 and 2000 deadlines. Much of the technical work has been performed by the UNCETDG (physical hazards), OECD (health and environmental hazards), and the ILO (hazard communication). This Programme is a positive example of the synergistic role of the Forum in the international community.	29. In some areas where technical work has not progressed sufficiently, political influence will be required over the next year.
Programme Area C: Information Exchange on Toxic Chemicals and Chemical Risks	
30. When effectively managed, information exchange can provide a sound basis for work in all aspects of chemical safety. This has been promoted by the IFCS through workshops and demonstrations held at ISG2 and Forum II. The IOMC member organizations are publishing an inventory of the considerable information they make available through the Internet, CD/ROM, hard copy and other means. The Global Information Network on Chemicals (GINC), which is an information exchange project using the Internet, has been most successful and is obtaining the co-operation of relevant organizations and countries.	31. More work needs to be done to ensure that information needs of developing countries are being met, including identifying what information is needed and determining the most effective and efficient means of getting the information to those who need it. The latter should pay particular attention to both the exchange of information between and within countries.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
32. The Forum, through discussions at ISG1, has provided general guidance as to how governments could make the current FAO/UNEP voluntary procedure for the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure mandatory. Negotiations should be completed before the end of 1997. Under the current voluntary PIC, 148 countries participate and have designated national authorities; over 60 countries have, thus far, received training in the implementation and operation of the procedure through the FAO/UNEP Joint Programme for the Operation of the PIC, in collaboration with UNITAR.	33. Supporting governments to ensure their capacity to develop or maintain the requisite infrastructure to support the PIC procedure.
Programme Area D: Establishment of Risk Reduction Programmes	
34. The Forum has provided advice on a range of priority risk reduction activities and encouraged co-ordination amongst the partners who are able to carry them out. IOMC member organizations have addressed a number of the Priorities for Action in this programme area, e.g., pesticide risk reduction; accidents prevention, preparedness and response; and prevention of toxic exposure.	35. The main remaining chalienge is to encourage all of the partners (governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations) to organize and implement further measures to reduce risks.
36. The Forum has proven its special role in a highly visible fashion with its work on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The IFCS developed, with IOMC member organizations, at the request of the UNEP Governing Council, an assessment of 12 specified POPs and provided recommendations on international action including a legally binding international instrument on POPs. Although few resources were available, the Forum was able to meet the UNEP request in little over a year and laid the groundwork for the POPs convention. A more traditional approach would have taken both more time and more money.	37. There is a need for developing sound criteria to identify chemicals beyond the 12 specified POPs that could be included in a global POPs Convention; and to determine if there are chemicals that pose significant risks that are not being addressed under on-going initiatives.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
38. Another area where the Forum has made a considerable impact is in the promotion of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). Since 1994, through ISG meetings, the IFCS has informed participants on the potential of PRTRs as highly effective and flexible risk management tools that can be adapted to meet the needs for a broad range of countries, including developing countries and countries with economies in transition. There are currently six nations with operational PRTRs. As many as 30 other countries are in the process of establishing PRTRs.	39. To continue to monitor and encourage progress in this area and in particular support public and labour NGO involvement while recognizing the concerns of the chemical industry related to the need to tailor PRTRs to local circumstances.
40. Other areas of priority that have been identified by one or more IFCS Regional Groups for future action by the Forum are:	
41. • The presence of large stockpiles of obsolete chemicals in many developing countries and those with economies in transition is an alarming problem.	42. The IFCS will work with FAO, other IOMC member organizations, and appropriate bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies and multilateral development banks to seek a co-ordinated approach to address this problem, and to discourage further development of new stockpiles.
43. • Forum II has discussed co-operation on research into and exchange of information on endocrine disrupting chemicals and requested the IOMC, through its Participating Organizations, to take further the initial efforts to coordinate activities and identify means of addressing the urgent issues.	44. Forum II decided to review the status of the work at ISG 3 in late 1998.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
45. • Noting the invitation by the UNEP Governing Council at its nineteenth session to the Executive Director, in close collaboration with the IOMC, to develop a report outlining options for enhanced coherence and efficiency among international activities related to chemicals. Forum II requested UNEP and the IOMC to expedite the work to make the report available in the third quarter 1998 to the Forum Standing Committee for review at ISG 3.	46. Generally, working with this type of issue through the IFCS may facilitate consensus before the issues are covered in more formal negotiations.
Programme Area E: Strengthening of National Capabilities and Capacities for Management of Chemicals	
47. The first essential for a government to reduce chemical risks is the legal, regulatory and administrative infrastructure to effectively manage chemicals. IFCS encourages regional co-operation and bilateral assistance as important means of building this infrastructure.	48. Progress has been slow with the great majority of countries still lacking adequate chemical management capacity or the mechanisms for ensuring liaison of all parties involved in chemical safety.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
49. The Forum has actively promoted the development of comprehensive national profiles which assess a country's chemicals management capacity and identify areas needing improvement through an interministerial consultation process as a key first step toward developing necessary capacity. Through a programme established by UNITAR, under the framework of the IOMC, 30 developing countries and countries in transition are receiving support to complete National Profiles by the end of 1997; a number of other countries are also undertaking the development of National Profiles. As an interim measure, a number of countries have developed "mini" profiles focusing on the legislative structure and capacities of countries; one Regional Group, the Expanded Americas, has compiled a Regional Profile based on this information. Regional meetings in Asia and Latin America have been offered in the near future. This is a considerable achievement through the stimulation and support of the Forum.	50. Many countries need to institute a stronger infrastructure to provide an effective management of chemical risks. Their work with the Forum would be greatly aided by well established national focal points and national co-ordinating committees with the power to implement chemical control programmes and the preparation and continuous updating of national profiles. The IFCS will need to take a more active role in promoting and co-ordinating, through its Regional Working Groups, the strengthening of national capacities for chemicals management.
51. The issue of bilateral assistance for chemical management was raised at ISG2 and the results of a survey undertaken by OECD were presented at Forum II. The IOMC is producing a detailed analysis of the capacity building activities of the member organizations and UNITAR. The report will be available in mid-1997. Together, this information should provide a strong foundation to more systematically address capacity building needs.	52. The IFCS mechanism can be used to better identify the technical co-operation needs to countries and facilitate the development of partnership frameworks to match these needs with potential sources of technical and financial resources. Such partnerships will need to include the provision of domestic resources in order to ensure national government commitment.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area F: Prevention of Illegal International Traffic in Toxic and Dangerous Products	53. The development of this issue requires effective chemical control legislation. When this is in place in a sufficient number of countries, the IFCS will evaluate the need for further efforts or measures in this Programme Area.

III. UNRESOLVED ISSUES

54. The Forum has made considerable progress since its establishment in 1994 and its identity and purpose is now widely recognized. There are, however, a number of issues whose resolution would greatly improve its success in achieving the goals of Agenda 21.

55. • The level of financial support to the Forum has not provided the long-term support of the Secretariat that is required. The Secretariat plays an essential role in the Forum achieving the goals of Chapter 19. Sound and consistent funding is essential to the proper working mechanism of the Forum.

56. • The Forum and the international organizations, particularly of the IOMC, have distinct and separate roles and responsibilities. A thorough understanding of these would greatly serve to advance efforts.

57. • Funding for the full participation of developing countries in the work of the Forum has been difficult to obtain. A long-term commitment by the partners in a position to provide assistance would be most beneficial.

58. • Funding for regional efforts has not matched the stated commitment of the Forum members to the importance of regional and sub-regional programmes. To date, Regional Working Groups have not succeeded in delineating regional and sub-regional priorities for technical assistance which is necessary for the development of regional strategies for capacity building and to mobilize resources for these endeavours from potential donors.

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

59. The Forum provides a unique, over-arching, mechanism for co-ordinating global action on chemicals. Its non-institutional nature and the wide range of participation on an equal footing mean that it is well suited to providing answers and assessments for the problems to health and environment raised by chemicals.

60. The mechanisms for the implementation of Forum initiatives and recommendations will need to be refined in the coming years. If adequate resources are made available to the Secretariat, a more business-like and determined approach can be made to ensure that the will of the Forum is adequately expressed by the necessary actions in the world arena. This will lead to the fulfilment of the high hopes of Agenda 21 for the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

61. The Forum has made an auspicious beginning; chemical problems are being solved in a new and imaginative manner. The full participation of all stakeholders bodes well for the future. What is now needed is strengthened commitment by all partners -- government, intergovernmental and non-governmental.

V. PROPOSALS TO UNGASS

The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS):

Reaffirms the importance of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and *recommends*, therefore, that United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS):

- *Recognize* that the sound management of chemicals is essential to sustainable development, and that it is a fundamental underpinning of human health, safety and environmental protection and in achieving success in many other chapters of Agenda 21.

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  - starting to deal with the problems of stocks of obsolete chemicals.

  However, despite substantial progress much remains to be done and will need to continue to be a priority well beyond the year 2000.

- *Recognize* that scientific research will continue to uncover new facts and bring about a better understanding of the effects of chemical substances on human health and the environment. One example is the rapidly growing body of scientific research that indicates that a number of substances have the potential to interfere with normal body functions governed by the endocrine system. Such emerging issues need to be addressed through research that leads to strategic actions to deal with these risks.

- *Recognize* the leadership role of those governments and organizations that have furthered the work of the Forum by bringing together governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the support of countries and organizations that have generously contributed by providing assistance to governments in need for their participation. Other countries and organizations are invited to join in promoting the sound management of chemicals through donation of funds or contributions in kind.

- *Recommend* that donors, including multilateral development banks, ensure that development policies, and investments in programs and projects that entail chemicals management include support for the necessary capacity building for developing countries and countries in economic transition to ensure the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

- *Recommend* that national governments take leadership to enhance the efforts of all the partners in finding innovative ways to provide necessary resources for the sound management of chemicals. In particular, this should focus on improving safety, promotion of cleaner technology, adoption of pollution prevention concepts, and capacity building.